UNITED
NATIONS

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Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

S/1995/1054
22 December 1995

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 22 DECEMBER 1995 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ERITREA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit a press statement by H.E. Mr. Isaias Afwerki, President of the State of Eritrea, issued at Asmara on 21 December 1995 on the situation in the Hanish archipelago in the Red Sea (see annex).

I should be grateful if you could have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Amdemicael KAHSAI
Permanent Representative

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Annex

Press statement by H.E. Mr. Isaias Afwerki, President of the State of Eritrea, on 21 December 1995, issued at Asmara on the situation in the Hanish archipelago in the Red Sea

1. It is indisputable that a lasting solution to the dispute rests solely on international mediation. As such, all joint efforts of both countries should be geared towards seeking ways and means of achieving this primary aim. Other options for a solution that may be contemplated outside this framework would be neither prudent nor practical.

2. In regard to the issue of the captured soldiers, this is not a matter that can be used as a bargaining point or a precondition. I have indeed consistently and explicitly conveyed this position to President Ali Abdella Saleh during our continuous telephone communications. It has also been expressed in our official statement. This is primarily an obligation of the Eritrean Government. As such, it is not acceptable as a precondition. The Government of Eritrea will, as a matter of fact, hand over all the prisoners to the International Committee of the Red Cross at Asmara in accordance with normal international procedures while in the meantime ensuring their well-being.

3. Concerning the issue of the evacuation from the islands - again I have repeatedly informed President Ali Abdella Saleh - if both countries agree in principle to withdraw their forces from the Hanish archipelago, a neutral mediating body acceptable to both parties should be established until such time as a lasting solution is found to the dispute through international arbitration. This body, which shall perform its duties under clear operational rules and regulations agreed upon by both parties, will be entrusted with the task of observing and monitoring both the evacuation process and its sequel until a verdict is reached by international arbitration. This body is necessary because both parties cannot fulfil the task on good will alone. To request as a precondition, and in an intimidating manner, that Eritrea alone should withdraw is, however, inappropriate and unacceptable.

4. The baseless accusations that have been made, including the alleged capturing of Yemeni fishermen by the Eritrean Government; that Eritrea is being used by external forces; and other similar inflammatory and irresponsible statements will only derail the issue into a perilous path, rendering a timely solution elusive. I therefore urge due restraint from such provocative campaigns.

5. I profoundly understand the concern and indignation of my brother, President Ali Abdella Saleh, as a consequence of the crisis that has unfolded. Here again, rather than dwelling on mutual accusations, I reiterate the previous proposal that I had conveyed to him to establish an impartial and independent body to investigate the incident. Slanderous accusations and threats among brothers are neither appropriate nor fruitful. Preconditions and intimidation will not likewise serve any purpose as mistakes cannot be corrected by other mistakes. In this spirit, I again appeal to President Ali Abdella Saleh to make the necessary efforts to contribute towards the resumption of a constructive dialogue that we should undertake as brothers and statesmen. And, while supporting, wholeheartedly, the initiative that Prime Minister Melles Zenawi has taken, I call upon other concerned leaders to join in the endeavour.